

## Section II

# Setting / History / Trends / Cultural Values

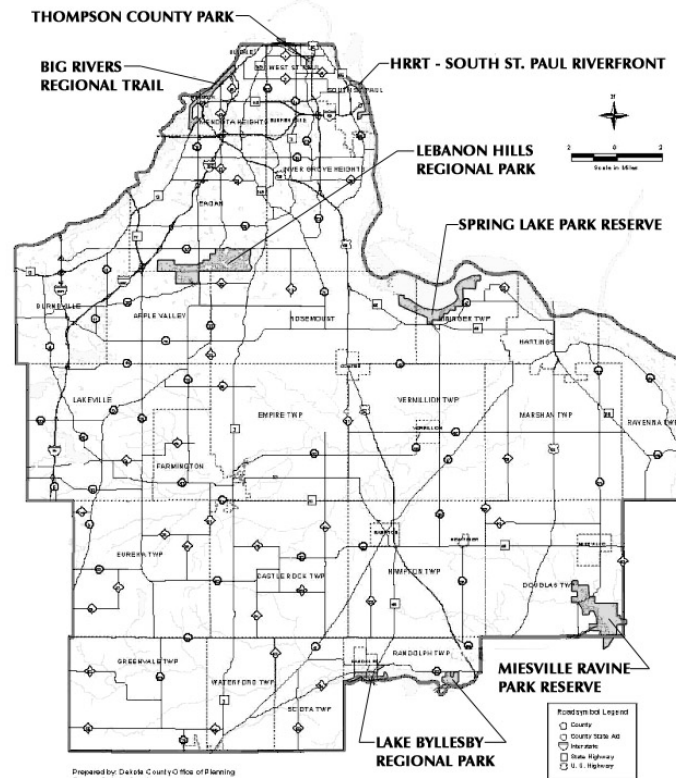
### Overview

This section of the master plan considers the setting for the park, its history, trends affecting its future, and its cultural values. Considered collectively, these variables played a major role in shaping the master plan and how the decisions made today will affect the park's future 10, 20, or even 50 years hence.

### Setting

Dakota County operates and maintains five major park units and one major trail unit. The agency oversees over 4,395 acres of acquired park land throughout the County. There are also about 1,191 acres yet to acquire. At around 2,000 acres, Lebanon Hills Regional Park is the largest, most centrally located, and highly used park within the Dakota County park system. Figure 2.1 illustrates the location of the park relative to the other parks within the County.

Figure 2.1 – Location of Lebanon Hills within Dakota County.



At around 2,000 acres, Lebanon Hills Regional Park is the largest, most centrally located, and highly used park within the Dakota County park system.

## Historical Land Acquisition and Use Perspective

Back in the 1930's, much of the park was used for open pasture land and, to a more limited degree, agricultural fields. This use continued until the mid to late-1960's and 1970's, when much of the property was acquired in piecemeal fashion for park purposes. Figure 2.2 provides an aerial view of the park from approximately 1937.

Figure 2.2 – Aerial view of Lebanon Hills around 1937.



As the aerial illustrates, development surrounding the park was relatively none existent during this era. Although much of the park boundary was established by the mid-1970's, a number of in-holdings remain to be acquired, as considered on the next page.

From a historical perspective, dairy farming was the dominant land use since settlement times. During the 1920's, prohibition created a strong incentive for illegal liquor production. With its rolling terrain and close proximity to the metropolitan area of the times, the park provided an opportune location for such an activity at that time. Ultimately, this use faded away.

*In 1974, the State Legislature passed the Metropolitan Parks Act that established the Regional Park System.*

*From an ecological perspective, the park is truly at a crossroads.*

*Collectively, there are less than 100 acres, or 0.5%, of land defined as in-holdings remaining within the park boundaries.*

In the 1930's there was a short period of attempted exploitation of non-existent marketable minerals and oil from the park. Although in the end it amounted to nothing more than fraud, it does add to the folklore associated with the park.

In 1974, the State Legislature passed the Metropolitan Parks Act that established the Regional Park System. As part of that action, the park formally became a regional park.

## **Ecological History**

From an ecological perspective, the site is truly at a crossroads. Since settlement, the natural values of the land were secondary to the more practical aspects of making a living from it. The impacts of past farming uses and more recent urban development, with its resulting stormwater runoff, have posed serious challenges to park's ecological stability.

Prior to pioneer settlement, natural processes took care of ensuring a biological diverse and healthy landscape. Since settlement, factors such as fragmentation of habitat, fire suppression practices, and the introduction of invasive alien plant and animal species have had a dramatic impact on the landscape. Over time, many aspects of the environment have become degraded. Lacking natural processes, reliance on nature to improve the biological health of the park is no longer an option. Human involvement will be needed in the short and long-term if the downward trend in the park's ecological qualities are to be reversed. Fortunately, improved land management techniques can be used to help restore and revitalize the ecological systems within the park.

## **Current Status of Acquisition of Park Land**

As of January, 2001, approximately 99.5% of the land with the designated park boundary has been acquired. Collectively, there are less than 100 acres, or 0.5%, of land defined as in-holdings (property designated for park purposes, but yet to be acquired) remaining within the park boundaries. There also seven residential properties within the park that are owned by the county. These concerns are considered in greater depth in Section IV.

## **Past Master Plan**

A master plan was prepared for the park in 1980. Although a number of the philosophical perspectives of that plan remain important today, after 20 years the plan was in need of updating. As of the date of adoption of this plan, that 1980 plan is no longer valid except from a historical perspective.

## Trend Forecasting

Trends related to population growth and characteristics, along with evolving recreational trends, greatly influence the master plan for Lebanon Hills in meeting the cultural needs of the regional community. As defined by the Metropolitan Council, a variety of trends are expected to impact the use of the regional park system over the next fifty years. The following defines the overarching trends that had a direct impact on master plan outcomes for Lebanon Hills. Consideration of these important points by the stakeholder task force, Technical Planning Team, and the public set the stage for defining the cultural values that the park will offer in the future.

### Population Trends for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and Dakota County

One of the more important trends is that the population in the metropolitan area is expected to continue to grow. As shown in the table in figure 2.3, the population forecast, as stratified by regional park agency jurisdiction, reveals that the population in Dakota County is expected to show the greatest increase.

*One of the more important trends is that the population in the metropolitan area is expected to continue to grow.*

Figure 2.3 – Population forecasts stratified by regional park agency jurisdiction. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System)

County/City	Preliminary Population estimates			Total increase from 2000		% increase from 2000	
	2000	2020	2050	2020	2050	2020	2050
Dakota County	351,240	456,160	579,436	104,920	228,196	30%	65%
Suburban Henn County	646,550	737,480	837,189	90,930	190,639	14%	29%
Washington County	203,120	288,670	377,082	85,550	173,962	42%	86%
Anoka County	295,910	350,410	440,575	54,500	144,665	18%	49%
Scott County	81,990	137,910	187,452	55,920	105,462	68%	129%
Carver County	66,160	104,420	145,144	38,260	78,984	58%	119%
Suburban Ramsey Co.	231,020	243,340	263,916	12,320	32,896	5%	14%
St. Paul	274,500	294,000	301,723	19,500	27,223	7%	10%
Minneapolis	370,000	388,000	392,656	18,000	22,656	5%	6%
Bloomington	88,500	91,000	92,978	2,500	4,478	3%	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,608,990</b>	<b>3,091,390</b>	<b>3,618,151</b>	<b>482,400</b>	<b>1,009,162</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>39%</b>

Note: Suburban Hennepin County does not include Bloomington or Minneapolis

Note: Suburban Ramsey County does not include St. Paul

Figure 2.4 – Change in population in Dakota County.

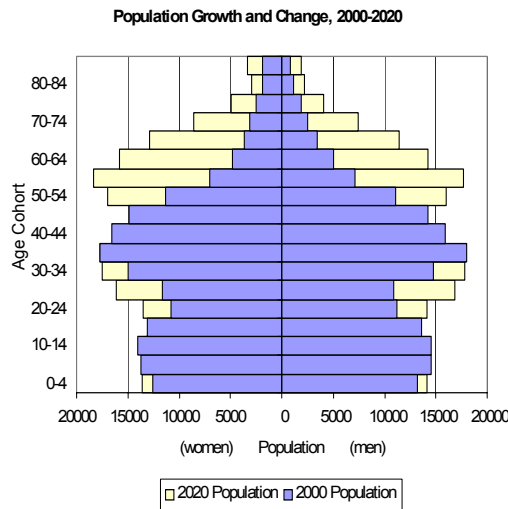
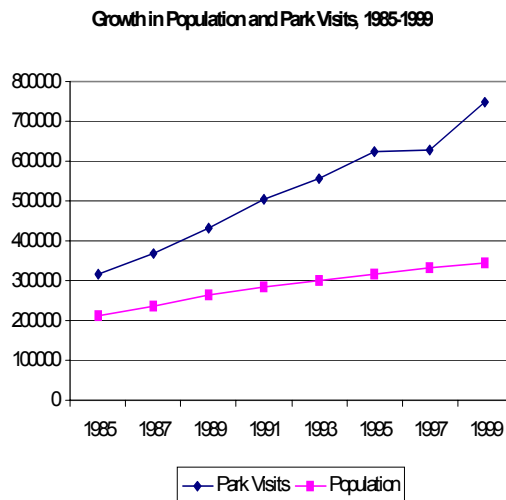


Figure 2.5 – Graphic illustrates the steepening rate of growth in park visits relative to population.



Another important consideration is the changing dynamic of the growing population. As defined in the draft *Dakota County Park System Plan (System Plan)*, the population in the county is expected to:

- ▶ Continue to grow, although at a slower pace than the last several decades.
- ▶ Change its “shape” (as shown in figure 2.4). The shape of the 2020 population represents a more mature community, with a greater balance across all age groups. In nearly all age groups, there will be more residents in Dakota County in 2020 than today. This change is especially significant for those age groups of 50-54 years and above.
- ▶ Be older, on average, in 2020 than it is today. The number of residents 55 years and older will increase from 47,040 in 2000 to 125,600 in 2020 – an increase of over 150%. These are the “baby boomers” moving into retirement. This group will account for 28% of all residents of the County by 2020.
- ▶ Maintain a strong base of young families with children in Dakota County. There will be nearly the same number of residents 15 years and younger in the County in 2020 as there are today – 82,560 in 2000 verses 82,050 in 2020. However, this group will represent a smaller percentage (24% verses 18%) of the total population in 2020.

As also defined in the System Plan, studies show that older people are more active than in previous generations and are staying active in their later years. This is especially the case with activities such as walking, hiking, bicycling, and nature observation. With better health and greater affluence than previous generations, the “baby boomers” are anticipated to continue to participate in outdoor recreation in high numbers.

In summary, as stated in the System Plan, Dakota County’s population will increase and more age-diverse, with a wider distribution of people among the age groups. Undoubtedly, this trend will put increasingly more pressure on Lebanon Hills to service a wider range of outdoor recreation needs. In addition, changing public needs will require the park to be adaptable over time.

## Trends in Park Visits

With an increasing population comes an increase in the number of park visits. As defined in the System Plan, trends in park visits include:

- ▶ Faster growth in park visits in Dakota County than population over the last fifteen years. Dakota County experienced rapid population growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but visits to its park system actually grew three times as fast. The figure at left illustrates the widening gap between visits and population.
- ▶ In 1999, the Metropolitan Council estimated 749,600 visits to Dakota County’s regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails. Dakota County’s estimated population in 1999 was 345,248.
- ▶ People are also using the park system more often – participation in recreation and leisure activities is increasing nationally and locally. This results in higher annual visits.
- ▶ Dakota County is also attracting more people from outside the County. This number is currently small, but is expected to increase as the County continues to add or improve facilities.



When looking further into future park visit trends, the numbers become even more telling as to the demands that will be placed on regional park resources such as Lebanon Hills. Figure 2.6 provides a rough estimate in the number of visits to the regional system for 2020 and 2050, as projected by the Metropolitan Council.

Figure 2.6 – Trends in overall park visits to the regional park system. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System )

	1999 Visits (1,000's)	2020 Visits (1,000's)	2050 Visits (1,000's)	2020 % increase	2050 % increase
Scott	187	249	308	33%	65%
Carver	175	225	280	29%	60%
Washington	586	743	908	27%	55%
Dakota	750	925	1,128	23%	50%
Anoka	1,843	2,165	2,610	17%	42%
Hennepin	3,235	3,715	4,240	15%	31%
Ramsey	1,577	1,771	2,004	12%	27%
Bloomington	807	902	1,003	12%	24%
St. Paul	4,588	5,136	5,665	12%	23%
Minneapolis	15,525	16,903	17,994	9%	16%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29,273</b>	<b>32,733</b>	<b>36,140</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>23%</b>

The challenge will be to spread use out across the park to avoid a concentration of visitors in one area and to maintain a sense of solitude that is very important to park users.

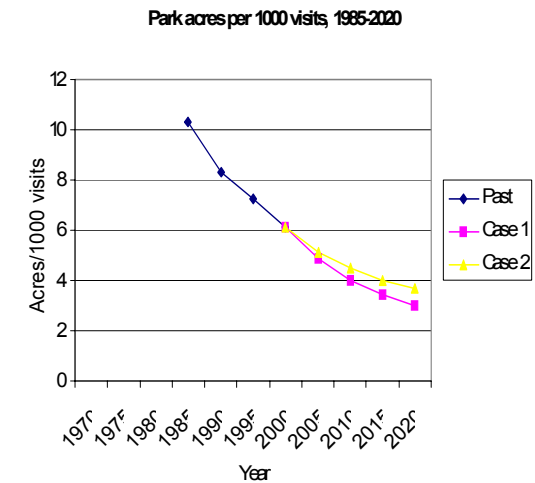
With an increase in visits come a propensity for crowding relative to current and past experiences. As figure 2.7 illustrates, there will simply be fewer acres available per person visit than there are today. Given this reality, the challenge will be to spread that use out across the park to avoid a concentration of visitors in one area and to maintain a sense of solitude that is very important to park users. Also, it will be necessary to increase the capacity of some facilities to accommodate increased public demand.

## Trends in Recreational Demands

Through review of a variety of studies undertaken by the Metropolitan Council and the Dakota County Parks Department, along with other sources, much can be learned about recreational trends influencing decisions about Lebanon Hills' future development. The following provides an overview of these findings.

From a regional perspective on park needs, the following tables provide insight into the interests and perspectives that people have regarding various forms of recreational activities.

Figure 2.7 – Trends in park acres per 1000 visits, 1985 - 2020. (Source: Dakota County Park System Plan.)



### Interest in an Outdoor-Based Activity

Source: "Leisure Trends in the Twin Cities" – University of Minnesota Survey Research Center (1996).

<b>Outdoor-Based Activity</b> (Ranked by Column 2, "Have Participated")	<b>"I am not interested in this activity." (%)</b>	<b>"I am interested in this activity and have participated about as often as I wanted to in the last 12 months." (%)</b>	<b>"I am interested in this activity but I have NOT participated as often as I would have liked to in the last 12 months." (%)</b>
Walking (around your neighborhood)	15	72	13
Walking (in natural area, large parks)	22	57	21
Picnicking	27	52	22
Attending sports events as a spectator	35	45	21
Casual sports (catch, frisbee, pickup games, etc.)	43	43	14
Gardening	37	41	22
Visiting playground areas outdoors	49	41	10
Visiting conservatory, arboretum, public gardens	33	39	29
Swimming or sunbathing at a beach	44	35	21
Informal birdwatching, nature study	52	35	14
Biking, 3 miles or less	48	34	19
Camping	42	33	25
Swimming or sunbathing at a pool	52	31	18
Fishing	44	29	27
Biking on paved trails in natural areas, large parks	51	26	23
Power boating, waterskiing, racing, jetskiing	60	23	17
Sledding	60	21	19
Other team sports (basketball, softball, soccer, etc.)	69	20	11
Jogging, running	70	20	10
Non-power boating (canoeing, sailing, sailboarding, etc.)	56	19	25
Biking on unpaved trails in natural areas, large parks	70	16	15
Inline skating, roller skating/skiing, skateboarding	75	14	11
Road biking	76	14	10

<b>Outdoor-Based Activity</b> (continued) (Ranked by Column 2, “Have Participated”)	<b>“I am not interested in this activity.” (%)</b>	<b>“I am interested in this activity and have participated about as often as I wanted to in the last 12 months.” (%)</b>	<b>“I am interested in this activity but I have NOT participated as often as I would have liked to in the last 12 months.” (%)</b>
Racquet sports (tennis, squash, racquetball, etc.)	72	13	15
Cross-country skiing	72	12	16
Snowmobiling	78	10	12
Ice skating (figure, speed, etc.)	79	10	11
Horseback riding	76	6	19
Playing ice hockey	89	6	5
Golf	90	6	5
Formal bird watching/nature study	86	5	9

### Various Perspectives on Parks

Source: “Leisure Trends in the Twin Cities” – University of Minnesota Survey Research Center (1996).

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Percentage of residents indicating agreement/disagreement with the following:</b>				
	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>
“I think parks would be valuable even if I didn’t actually use them very much.”	60	34	5	1	1
“I think more park land will have to be acquired to serve the population of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area <u>in the year 2010.</u> ”	26	37	24	11	3
“I think we should improve the maintenance of existing parks before we develop any new ones.”	18	38	29	13	2
“I think more park land should be acquired to serve the <u>present</u> population of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.”	23	31	28	13	4
“I think we should develop the park land we have before we buy any more.”	14	34	31	17	4



Whereas the last two tables provide a snapshot of peoples preferences at a given point in time, looking into the future and forecasting trends in visits to the regional park system is also very telling and important to the master planning process. The following table provides some insights regarding the estimated increase in activity visits.

Figure 2.8 – Trends in overall park visits to the regional park system. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System)

Activity	Base <sup>1</sup> (1,000's)	Projected change for 2020 (%)	Projected change for 2050 (%)	Projected visits for 2020 (1,000's)	Projected Visits for 2050 (1,000's)
Walking/hiking	9,548	23%	48%	11,744	14,131
Biking	5,482	18%	54%	6,469	8,442
Non-pool swimming	4,280	12%	37%	4,794	5,864
Picnicking	3,240	16%	23%	3,759	3,985
Sightseeing	1,020	34%	76%	1,367	1,795
Fishing	1,160	11%	15%	1,288	1,334
Motorboating	540	7%	20%	578	648
Nonconsumptive wildlife activities	360	40%	72%	504	619
nonmotorized boating	300	33%	78%	399	534
Developed camping	280	19%	32%	333	369
Family gathering	220	14%	33%	251	293
Cross-country skiing	217	-1%	18%	215	256
Horseback riding	60	27%	100%	76	120
Snowmobiling	N/A	42%	121%	N/A	N/A
Visiting historic places	N/A	39%	76%	N/A	N/A
Visiting a beach or waterslide	N/A	14%	35%	N/A	N/A
Hiking	N/A	12%	24%	N/A	N/A
Backpacking	N/A	-2%	10%	N/A	N/A
primitive camping	N/A	-4%	-20%	N/A	N/A
<b>Metro Population increase</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,707</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>31,775.5</b>	<b>38,391.3</b>

<sup>1</sup> Base number of visits were determined using the Metropolitan Council's 1999 Annual Use Estimate and 1998/99 Regional Parks Visitor Study. It was not possible to determine the base visits for 1999 for those activities labeled "N/A". For some activities such as "hiking" and "visiting a beach or waterslide", they are partially subsets of broader activity categories ("walking" and "nonpool swimming").

Looking into the future and forecasting trends in visits to the regional park system is also very telling and important to the master planning process.

## Other Regional Trends of Note

A number of other notable regional trends add insight into the long-term prospects for Lebanon Hills in terms of user base and challenges. As defined in the *Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System* study, these include:

- ▶ Current lower than expected use of the regional park system by teens and young adults will be reflected in lowered future use of the regional park system by these groups. Leisure research has shown that recreation habits are formed as children and teenagers. What this means is that if teens and young adults are currently not using the regional park system, it is probable that they will continue through their adult life to not use the regional system. Education at an early age about the values that regional parks can bring to one's life will be important to changing this trend.
- ▶ The baby boom generation will continue to have a large presence in the regional park system, but their needs will change. The baby boom generation is currently using the regional park system at rates that are higher than their actual share of the metropolitan area population. Visitation by people over the age of 60 is expected to increase as the baby boom generation ages and continues their use of the regional park system. Facilities will need to be kept up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, and more opportunities for low impact and educational learning opportunities should be provided to meet the needs of this growing user base.
- ▶ The regional park system will see the effects of an increase in population neutralized to a large degree by a major segment of the population that has not developed a leisure routine that includes visiting regional parks. This is a result of the current under-use by teens and young adults, who will also be less likely to take their children to regional parks, which could develop a downward trend in visitation over multiple generations. The Council and implementing agencies are aware of this issue and will be working on assessing potential barriers to participation and identifying ways to increase visitation to the regional park system by these age groups.
- ▶ Facilities in regional parks need to be assessed to ensure they help meet the needs of the growing ethnically-diverse segments of the population.
- ▶ Demand for mini-vacation opportunities in the local area will increase. Camping in regional parks may become more popular among local residents. Expect increased interest and markets for packages that combine camping with resource education programs or specific organized activity events such as bird banding, astronomy, walking or adventure recreation.
- ▶ Increasing oil prices may decrease automobile fuel consumption and long auto-trips to national or state parks may decrease in frequency. As such, demand for local recreation opportunities that involve less travel will increase, as will non-automobile access to regional park system units.
- ▶ Over the next ten years, the number of recreational vehicles (RVs) and proportion of households with an RV should rise moderately, to 3.1 % of all households. Regional park units will be challenged with the pressure to develop more RV-oriented sites while trying to meet the needs and desires of local residents.

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*Expect increased interest and markets for packages that combine camping with resource education programs or specific organized activity events.*

*"A new paradigm is emerging in the regional park system that focuses on the benefits obtained from visiting parks. This new approach focuses on providing quality benefits to individuals, social/community benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits."*

*Although the survey group is rather limited and does not account for all potential winter users, it is a confirmation of the key values that are so prevalent with this park — maintain the natural experience, sense of place, and challenge that the park offers.*

## Park Management Trends

As defined by the Metropolitan Council, *"a new paradigm is emerging in the regional park system that focuses on the benefits obtained from visiting parks. This new approach focuses on providing quality benefits to individuals, social/community benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits."* As stated by the Council, this approach takes on a more holistic attitude than previous management approaches.

Under this approach, the report makes the following points:

- ▶ The regional park system needs to have a stronger focus on identifying and quantifying the benefits provided by the system.
- ▶ Community and environmental benefits and costs will play an increasingly important role in decisions made about planning, managing and funding the regional park system.
- ▶ Quantifying the economic benefits of regional parks will strengthen the ability of the system to compete for funding and will allow for inclusion of parks in the economic models used in making decisions that affect the region.

## Winter Use Study Findings

In 1999, the Metropolitan Council conducted a study of winter users in regional parks. Whereas the study has its limitations in that it focused on winter users, it does reveal some telling points that are reflective of recurring themes from the public meetings that were held. Study highlights include the following:

- ▶ Close to home, no cars or motorized vehicles, and an opportunity to experience nature were highest rated reasons for visiting Lebanon Hills over another park.
- ▶ The fact that the park provides the feeling of solitude and privacy, an opportunity to experience nature, and challenging winter trails is a major reason why users are coming here versus going somewhere else.
- ▶ From a winter users perspective, the need for a warming house, rental equipment, and other support is not very important.
- ▶ Satisfaction with the facilities is very high, with 98% of those surveyed expressing this opinion.

Although the survey group is rather limited and does not account for all potential winter users, it is a confirmation of the key values that are so prevalent with this park — maintain the natural experience and sense of place. Maintaining the challenge of the ski trails offered within the park was also important to winter users.

## Visitor and Program Support Needs at Lebanon Hills Regional Park

Although the above trend information is pertinent to Lebanon Hills, some trend information and other statements of need at the park level are worthy of comment. These in turn support many of the conclusions made in the master plan. A number of up-front points include:

- ▶ 335,600 people visited Lebanon Hills Regional Park in 1999.
- ▶ Visits to the Dakota County Park System increased 93% between 1988 and 1999.
- ▶ 2000 Visitor Survey Results reveal that of 321 respondents in Lebanon Hills Regional Park, 48% were from Apple Valley, Eagan, and Rosemount and 52% were from elsewhere.
- ▶ 39% of the Dakota County residents who responded to a 1995 Metropolitan Council Leisure Survey indicated that the County had too few nature centers. This percentage was the highest of the agencies in the Regional Park System.

The lack of a nature center with classroom for the County's Comprehensive Outdoor Education Program has become a mounting issue. Lebanon Hills, as the most centrally-located of the County's parks, plays a major role in supporting this program. To this issue, a number of points can be made that affect the master plan:

- ▶ Programming for the general public is in its second year and interest is growing. During the period from summer 1999 to summer 2000, 117 programs were offered and 5,513 people participated.
- ▶ The mailing list of interested participants continues to grow as exposure to offerings grow.
- ▶ Half of 1999 programs had waiting lists of persons who could not be accommodated due to lack of space.

In 2000, the Dakota County Parks Department increased the variety of programs offered in Lebanon Hills due to high demand. Examples of popular new programs include the Kids Camps, Family Springtime Hike, Underground Railroad, and Hunting the Wild Mushroom. Programs for special audiences were added and were highly successful (e.g., programs for Women and Parent/Child). Given the successes, new senior programs are being offered in winter of 2001. In 2000, the number of canoeing and kayaking classes that were offered (up from 6 to 15) increased. In addition, some programs have both indoor and outdoor components (e.g., make your own snowshoes, winter camping, under the stars with Mike Lynch).

The current use of Camp Sacajawea to support some of these programs displaces youth groups wanting to use the Camp. In addition, limited space is available to store equipment ( e.g., canoes, kayaks, cross-country skis, snowshoes) used for programs. There is also no space for presenters or for programming staff to store, organize, and prepare for programs. Likewise, there is no space for educational and interpretive exhibits.

Due to the lack of facilities, a number of the recommendations found in the adopted Outdoor Education Plan have not been implemented. These include:

- ▶ Recommendation 2 – Provide outdoor education services to current users of park facilities.
- ▶ Recommendation 5 – Provide outdoor education services for families. Family programming has been popular.
- ▶ Recommendation 11 – Provide self-guided opportunities. This recommendation includes self-guided trails with interpretive signs and a central trailhead with a kiosk/map where main trails start and finish.

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- ▶ Recommendation 12 – Provide facilities for outdoor education services. This recommendation includes a nature center/interpretive center to be incorporated within a visitor center/trailhead complex to provide outdoor education programming and facilities for rental equipment
- ▶ Recommendation 14 – Provide outdoor education services for school groups.
- ▶ Recommendation 16 – Provide outdoor education with a winter emphasis. This includes a facility for multi-use year-round programming; rental equipment for winter activities; and winter outdoor education programs.

With the addition of a well-designed and appropriately sized visitor center, the number of visitors and program participants that can be served through education programs will be greatly enhanced. It will also bring first-time users into the park and orient them to what the park offers. Other defined needs related to a visitor center include:

- ▶ Visitor orientation (important for first time visitors).
- ▶ Safety (phone, shelter from storms, etc.).
- ▶ Comfort (restroom/beverages/ shelter/get out of elements).
- ▶ Congregation (meet other park users, starting point for hike or other activity).

Other related goals requiring support facilities include:

- ▶ Metropolitan Council Recreation Open Space Development Guide/Policy Plan -Development Goal – To provide facilities that will enable operators of the regional recreation open space system to offer planned services and to be responsive to the changing tastes and wishes of their users in so doing.
- ▶ County Vision Goal – Provide quality user-friendly facilities and services.
- ▶ Parks Mission Statement – To enrich lives by providing high quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.
- ▶ Department Goal – Provide enjoyable environmental education and outdoor recreation experiences for people of all ages and abilities.
- ▶ Outdoor Education Plan (adopted 1998) – To provide outdoor education services that create a sense of stewardship for Dakota County Park's natural and cultural heritage and to promote increased understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources.

*Whether formal or casual, education about the park, its environment, and the cultural values it provides is the cornerstone to building a long-term commitment to its stewardship.*

In attempting to provide what is listed above, one fundamental truth gets to the heart of what Dakota County is trying to achieve: whether formal or casual, education about the park, its environment, and the cultural values it provides is the cornerstone to building a long-term commitment to its stewardship. Lacking the basic facilities that are needed for even the simplest of human interfaces with the park, the likelihood of gaining the larger community's commitment to supporting it becomes less certain. Although a simple trail through the woods serves many people's needs and ideals for this space, it alone is not the sole answer to the bigger questions facing the park. Outreach to the community through the provision of nature and outdoor-oriented services and programs is also an essential part of a successful formula.

## Public Process and Finding Common Ground

*The public process was purposefully exhaustive to ensure that all interested parties had ample opportunity to participate in preparing the planning plan.*

The public process was purposefully exhaustive to ensure that all interested parties had ample opportunity to participate in preparing the planning plan. In addition to stakeholder task force meetings that were routinely held, several public open houses along with public meetings with Dakota County's Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PARAC), Physical Development Committee (PDC), and the County Board gave interested citizens the chance to express their views, passions, and concerns. In each case, fruitful information came out of the dialogue that helped shape the final master plan.

Another important aspect of the public process was direct interaction with individuals and groups wanting to provide input. Through the course of the project many one-on-one meetings and conversations were held with groups represented by task force members and citizens at-large who had particular concerns. These informal meetings added much depth to the debate and greater understanding of the issues of concern. The public process also included opportunities for information to be shared via emails, mailings, and web page updates. The following table summarizes these points of contact with the public.

Date	Group	Meeting Agenda	Date	Group	Meeting Agenda
7/20/00	Task Force	Project overview/programming	1/31/01	Task Force	Ecology/water resources
8/29/00	Task Force	Ecological conditions/stewardship planning	2/13/01	Task Force	Written report review
10/3/00	Task Force	Vision/development program	2/21/01	PARAC	Draft master plan report
10/26/00	Task Force	Concept plans	3/13/01	PDC	Draft master plan report
11/7/00	PDC*	Concepts /progress to date	3/20/01	County Board***	Draft master plan report
11/8/00	PARAC**	Concepts/progress to date	3/20/01 through 4/19/01		Public review period
11/9/00	Open House	Review concept plans	4/25/01	PARAC	Final approval of master plan
11/30/00	Task Force	Preliminary master plan	5/8/01	PDC	Final approval of master plan
1/04/01	Task Force	Preliminary master plan refinements	5/15/01	County Board	Final approval of master plan
1/10/01	PARAC	Preliminary master plan	June	Metropolitan Council	Approval of master plan
1/17/01	Open house	Preliminary master plan			

In addition to the formal scheduled meetings, twenty-four informal meetings were held with stakeholder groups and interested citizens, as well as an uncounted number of phone conversations and emails. There was also ten meetings with the Technical Planning Team during the course of the project.

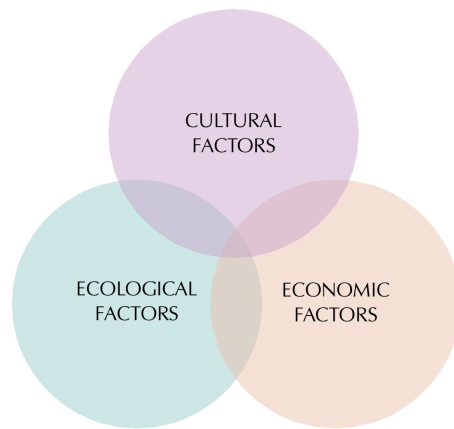
\* PDC: Dakota County Physical Development Committee

\*\* PARAC: Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

\*\*\* County Board: Dakota County Board of Commissioners



Figure 2.9 – Intrinsically linked cultural, ecological, and economic factors.



*The master plan places great emphasis on the ecological values of the park.*

*However, in reality it is the realization of the collective cultural values that sets the stage for greater public awareness of and interest in the ecological protection of the park and making the investments needed for its long-term stewardship.*

## Cultural Values Statement

The master plan defines the individual components of the park that collectively describe its ecological and cultures values. Important to this discussion is underscoring the fact that cultural, ecological, and economic factors affecting the park are intrinsically linked, as illustrated in figure 2.9. In this context, cultural values refers to the recreational, educational, and spiritual opportunities that the park provides to the regional community. Although perhaps a bit of an uncommon term, spiritual opportunities relate to the hard to describe, but profoundly important, passions and high esteem that virtually all of the citizens, stakeholders, and staff have for this particular park. It also underscores the necessity of wildness to humanity's spiritual health. It is a place to renew and refresh, to be inspired, to gain humility by seeing that there is more to the world than what is man-made or manufactured. It is a place to think clearly, to ponder and meditate. This quality above all underpins the value that the park has to people as they walk the trails, ride their horses, participate in an outdoor education program, or simply sit on a rock and reflect on the moment.

The master plan places emphasis on the ecological values of the park. Philosophically, it would be expected that preserving these ecological values alone would be enough of a mandate to ensure long-term stewardship of the park. However, in reality it is the realization of the *collective* cultural values that sets the stage for greater public awareness of and interest in the ecological protection of the park and making the investments needed for its long-term stewardship. Lacking high collective cultural value, the risk of apathy and resulting lack of a mandate for economic investment in the park to restore and manage its ecological assets become very real concerns.

Although the balance between ecological preservation and human use of the park cannot be compromised, the route to preserving its ecological qualities lies in providing a responsible cross-section of cultural values that serves the public need. With this in mind, the master plan strived to find the right balance of these values that would stay within the bounds of preserving the very qualities that people come to the park to enjoy. Although well-intentioned people see individual nuances of the plan differently based on their unique perspectives and desires, collectively the master plan is believed to "work well" in the broader context of balance.

Integral to the discussion about balance is that although cultural values are the engine behind the ultimate protection of this park, showing due restraint in the expansion of the "development footprint" was consciously considered throughout the planning process. The majority of the stakeholders felt it to be most appropriate, in the spirit of restraint, to stay within existing development areas wherever possible when considering physical improvements. This philosophy affected the development plan for the park in substantial ways, as is shown in the forthcoming sections. Also, in instances where it made sense, existing facilities that no longer "fit" the vision for the park or undercut its ecological values were removed or relocated.

*In the end, a common voice was found.*

*Although difficult at times, this broad and honest dialogue strengthened the master plan.*

*It is only by working together toward a common goal that the opportunities and challenges facing the park can be met and a sustainable future assured.*

*The appropriate balance between recreation and preservation was comprehensively discussed and represented multiple perspectives.*

## Finding Common Ground

As defined in the last section, bringing people together to consider all aspects of the park's history and decide its future was the basis for all phases of the master planning process. Through direct collaboration with stakeholders representing many different interests, the planning process netted a richer understanding of the perspectives and cultural values held by the community. Consensus building on difficult planning issues had its challenges and required people to find common ground. During that process, the task force, public at-large, and County staff each proved themselves to be open to differing views on important issues. In the end, a common voice was found.

Although difficult at times, this broad and honest dialogue strengthened the master plan. In the end, differences of opinion moderated as people realized that each person that took the time to participate held similar passions about the park and the importance of responsible stewardship of this wonderful and unique regional amenity.

While the master plan captures the essence of the planning process and sets forth a vision for the park, it alone is not enough. Continued reliance on, and nurturing of, the relationships that have been forged and trust built between Dakota County and the citizens it serves is what will be needed if the common vision presented here is to be realized. It is only by working together toward a common goal that the opportunities and challenges facing the park can be met and a sustainable future assured.

## Finding Common Ground on Challenging Issues

Finding common ground on planning issues was perhaps most tested when discussion centered on the need for a visitor center to support ever-increasing use of the park and the programs being offered. Clearly, this issue was at the epicenter of the dialogue about future uses. It also proved that a willingness to openly discuss issues would lead to workable solutions, which ultimately was the case in this and other instances.

Important to this discussion is Dakota County Parks Department's mission, which is to provide natural resource-based recreation and preservation of the parkland. The appropriate balance between recreation and preservation was comprehensively discussed and represented multiple perspectives. The challenge was to meet the public's current and future expectations for the appropriate type of recreation within Lebanon Hills Regional Park. The increasing visitation of the park will place additional demands on the park and the services it provides.

As a result of the discussions, the master plan reflects an appropriate balance between recreation and preservation. The plan will be instrumental in providing the conceived vision to guide the development, use, and management of the park.

## Conclusions

Although it may seem to be inherently difficult to do, drawing conclusions about the future direction of the park is in reality rather straightforward and concise: through the conscientious and well-intentioned efforts of many, the forthcoming master plan seeks to position the park to accommodate a broadening sphere of cultural values while preserving the ecological systems and sense of place that bring people there in the first place.